

From: Fpridecker@aol.com (Submitted by his wife Fran Decker)

Captain Bob
Robert James Decker
12/22/37-04/30/15

Captain Bob has set sail on that final voyage to kitty heaven and those of us left on land will miss him dearly. He is at peace after an 8 year battle with anal cancer. He was most grateful to Dr. Anesa Ahamad, Dr. Al Sullivan and Danette Nelson for making his last days pleasant ones.

Bob was born in Poughkeepsie NY to Charles Edward Decker and Lillian Ella Cain Decker. His older "brother dear" was Charles Edward Decker (Lorraine) of Danville CA who passed away last year and his younger sister is Joan (Sonny) Connor of Millbrook NY. He leaves behind his wife of thirty years, Fran Decker of Key West, the mother of his children Olga Kraus of Stow MA, son James (Bonnie) Decker of Sterling MA, son Barry Decker of Stow MA, daughter Diane (Rolf) Decker of Littleton MA, daughter Claire Locher of Darien CT and Manchester MA, and grandchildren Eric, Jillian, Scarlet, Ruby, Rose, Rolf and Daria.

Bob was the school golf champion at Poughkeepsie High, the Poughkeepsie City Club champion and was a NY State high school golf finalist four times. He served in the Navy as a radar tech on the seagoing ocean tug Utina delivering supplies and towing targets. When his stellar golf reputation was discovered, he was pulled from deck duty to play with the Admiral at Guantanamo. Bob was chosen to be a test subject for seasickness drug Dramamine and he was court marshaled for falling asleep on duty due to high levels of the drug.

He married Olga in 1960 and graduated from Dutchess Community College in 1961. He got in on the ground floor as an engineer and tech writer at General Electric, Sanders and Digital Equipment Corporation in the newly evolving field of mini and personal computers. He met his lifelong friend Jim Kendall at Sierra Research where he was an application engineer, then moved into sales and marketing. He had another stint at DEC marketing manufacturing, distribution and control projects. He was the project manager for DEC's first word processing software. He and Olga divorced in 1970. Bob stayed involved in his children's lives, taking them skiing, hiking and canoeing every chance he got. They all have an abiding love of nature and outdoor activities.

One day stuck in Boston traffic on a bridge over the Charles River and watching the sailboats below, he got the sailing bug and learned the basics at Community Boating. After owning a Hunter for a year, decided to get an ocean going boat for longer voyages and purchased a 35 ft Cheoy Lee that he named Double Decker after an ice cream cone enjoyed while trying to think of a perfect boat name. Bob took a leave of absence from DEC for a dream trip of sailing to the Caribbean. No one he knew was able to take off on such a voyage, so he ran an ad in Sail Magazine and Cruising World to find crew and used his new word processing skills to field the many replies.

This ad proved to be more successful than he imagined. Bob set sail in 1981 with a crew of four, not knowing his future wife and love of his life was onboard. On Halloween night, a category 1 hurricane was born and the boat was rolled by a 50 ft wave. Badly damaged, they kept sailing, even refusing help from a passing aircraft carrier. At this point, Fran fell in love with Bob, as he was the only one to keep his head and not panic in the dire situation. They made it to St. Thomas after 21 days at sea. The others quit, leaving Bob and Fran to enjoy idyllic sailing and exploring Caribbean islands until a dismasting in Martinique forced them into temporary repairs and a return via the Bahamas to Boston.

Bob returned to DEC, but quickly realized the real excitement was to be had at little startup computer companies so he left to join Microsystems International and Cubic Systems as NE Sales manager. Bob and Fran were married on the Double Decker in 1984 at the Charlestown Marina, back when the clubhouse was the old barge with a soda machine that dispensed beer. After the ceremony, everyone was treated to a sunset sail in the harbor. They were to honeymoon in Bermuda, but realized they could spend two months there on the Double Decker, which they did the following year. Their actual honeymoon was spent sailing the "wrong" way around Cape Cod with "just Married" taped to the sail and flowers in the rigging.

The sailing bug was still biting so Bob and Fran quit their jobs, sold house and cars and left on a three year

voyage of a lifetime that took them from Boston to the Caribbean via Bermuda, Venezuela, the ABC islands, Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize and Mexico. Special memories included a dugout canoe trip and hike to Angel Falls, two months in the San Blas Islands with the Kuna Indians, helping other boaters take their boats through the Panama Canal, sailing up the Rio Dulce and taking Olive Oyl the boat cat on bus rides throughout Guatemala.

They were just passing through Key West in 1988 when they realized the Florida Keys had everything they liked about the Caribbean, but was the good old USA and they settled down in Marathon in an octagonal tree house on Flamingo Island named Barefoot Key. Bob took up golf again and taught Fran the game at the Sombrero County Club. Life was good with plenty of sailing and diving so they got a little dive boat, the Barefoot Girl and later a bigger one, the Mister Bob. Bob and Fran had many memorable parties around the BBQ pit on the dock there with all the wonderful neighbors of Flamingo Island.

Bob and Fran went to work for best friend Jim Kendall at his start up company, Ocean Isle Software developing remote communication software. After some successful years building the company, it was bought out in 1994 and Bob retired from the computer world for good. Now here was Bob's chance to have fun with the boat and he began Double Decker Sailing Charters at Key West Bight. Bob and Fran took people on sailing trips, snorkels, sunset sails, lobster dinners, proposals, weddings and funerals while regaling them with tales from their sailing voyages.

Soon Bob and Fran were spending half their days in Marathon and half in Key West on the boat, so when the opportunity arose, they moved to Casa Sapodilla in Key West in 2005, where it was easier for Bob to run his charters and for Fran to pursue a career as an artist. Cancer came along in 2007, but did not slow Bob down until 2015. Bob sold the boat in 2012 to some former charter guests, who were then married at the last wedding on the Double Decker. Bob and Fran traveled extensively to Africa, Europe, South and Central America and lived life in Key West to the fullest. Bob particularly enjoyed getting body painted at Fantasy Fest for the Friday Cemetery Masquerade March every year for 25 years. Bob and Fran loved the famous Decker family ski trips in New England and fishing trips at Lake Sebago. Birthday celebrations were always big, but none topped the one where Sushi, Key West's most famous drag queen dressed Bob in drag and made him dance to entertain his family and friends.

Captain Bob was also famous for his amazing moving Christmas light displays at the corner of Elizabeth and Southard. For 10 years, the display grew, from just lights outlining the house, to dolphins diving through a wreath across the front below a rowing snowman and a fishing Santa, then fishes swam around the Elizabeth side, wishing everyone a "Merry Keysmas." All the displays were hand made and animated by Bob and he won an award every year from HTA and Keys Energy. Bob's lights have been donated to MARC House, so they joy they bring to all who see them will continue next year and into the future.

Captain Bob was a kind and loving husband, friend, father and grandfather. He always supported and encouraged Fran, his friends, and family to follow their dreams and enjoy life. He loved his cats Mango, Coco, Sweet Pea, Nosey and Olive Oyl and all the pets he ever had. He was a "make it happen" kind of guy and his favorite saying was "the adventure continues..."

There will be a celebration of life at a later date which will include the unveiling of a sailboat sculpture memorial by Craig Berube-Gray at the Key West Cemetery and, of course, a sunset sail. Another memorial will be held in Boston. Please contact Fran for details. In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to the MARC House, the SPCA or VNA/Hospice of the Florida Keys.

We are going to have Bob's Boston Celebration of life on Saturday June 13 at Pier 6 in Charlestown, 1:30-4.

And the big one will be in Key West in August 8, 5:00 at the cemetery followed by a sunset sail.

Contact Fran for details at email fpridecker@aol.com